



BUREAU OF
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MINIDOKA NORTH SIDE N E W S B R I E F

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RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

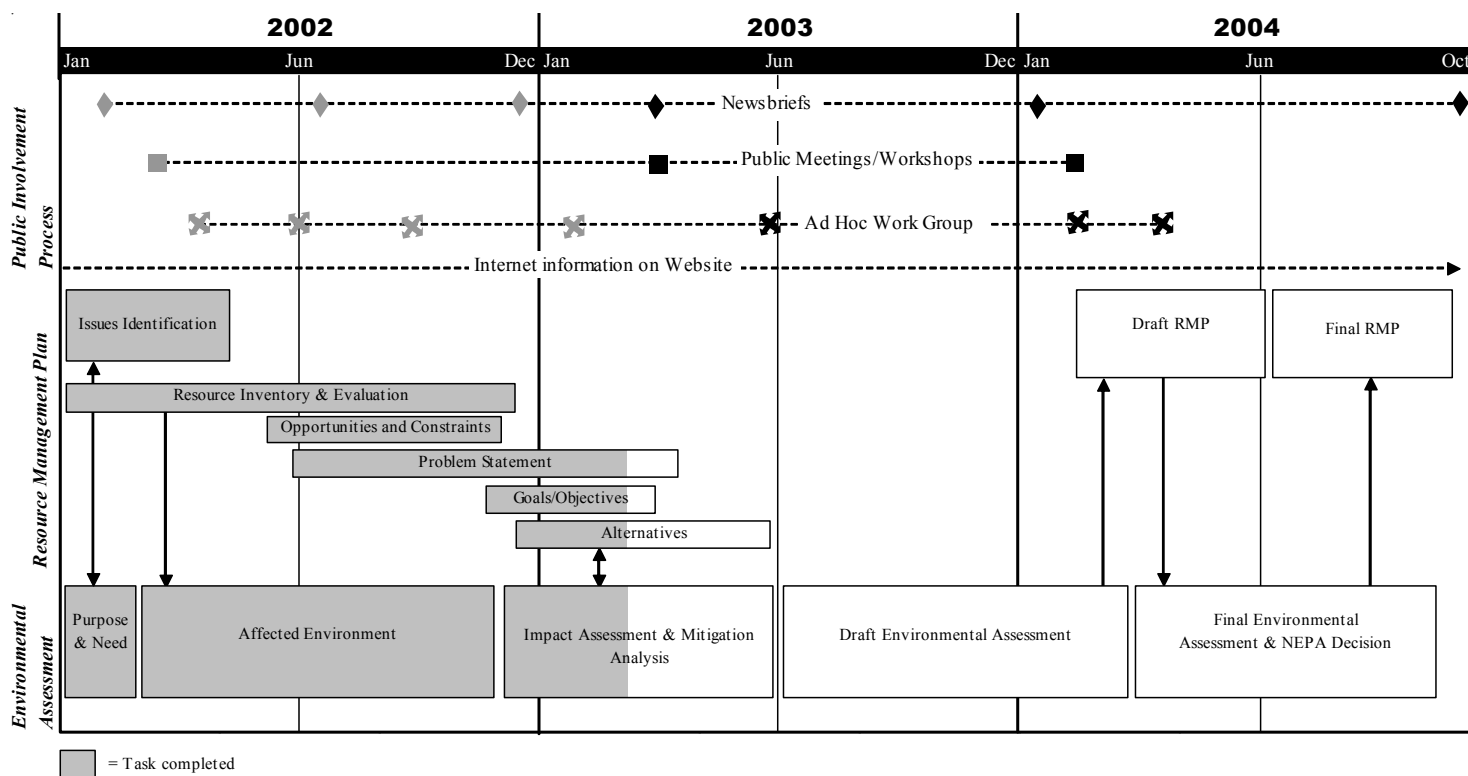
Reclamation Shapes Draft Goals & Objectives, Draft Management Alternatives

Status of the Planning Process

This is the fourth Newsbrief prepared as part of the Minidoka North Side Resource Management Plan (RMP) effort. This issue summarizes the work that has occurred since the last Newsbrief (December 2002), lists the RMP Draft Goals and summarizes the Draft Objectives, and provides an overview of the Draft Alternatives now being developed. Additionally, this Newsbrief announces the next public meeting/workshop to be held March 20 in Burley, ID. At this meeting, you will have an opportunity to learn more about the subjects in this Newsbrief and to voice your comments and concerns. You are also invited to provide comments to us by U.S. mail (see return address on this Newsbrief) or through the Internet (at www.pn.usbr.gov – follow *Minidoka RMP* links to the Comment Form).

The early stages of the RMP planning process include three main steps: (1) developing the Problem Statement; (2) drafting the RMP Draft Goals & Objectives; and (3) preparing the preliminary Draft Alternatives. The Problem Statement, which was the focus of the previous Newsbrief, is now almost finalized. This document provides Reclamation's Planning Team with a detailed and thorough understanding of the issues and opportunities that the RMP needs to address and was our starting point for developing the Draft Goals & Objectives. It also provides an important record of all concerns expressed by other agencies, the public (including the Ad Hoc Work Group), Tribes, and the Planning Team.

Schedule and Workplan



Draft Goals & Objectives

The RMP Draft Goals & Objectives chart the current direction of the RMP in terms of management philosophy, RMP requirements and approach, and potential areas for management action. They reflect the full range of issues and opportunities to be addressed in the RMP. Reclamation will use the Goals & Objectives as criteria when assessing alternative courses of management action.

The RMP Goals are listed below, grouped into six topics: Land Use & Management, Natural Resources, Cultural Resources, Indian Sacred Sites, Indian Trust Assets, and Recreation & Access. A brief summary of the Draft Objectives is also provided for each topic. The RMP Draft Goals & Objectives were derived from: (1) the public involvement process (particularly Ad Hoc Work Group discussions); (2) ongoing coordination with Reclamation decision-makers regarding the scope of the RMP and Reclamation's mission/authority related to RMP preparation and implementation; (3) findings of the RMP resource inventory; and (4) input from resource specialists on the RMP Planning Team.

Land Use & Management (LUM)

Goal LUM 1: Ensure that Project purposes are not restricted or impacted as a result of other uses and activities.

Goal LUM 2: Provide direction on the use or disposal of Reclamation property.

Goal LUM 3: Engage and work cooperatively with other agencies to manage resources, uses, and activities on appropriate Reclamation lands.

Goal LUM 4: Ensure protection of the public, facilities, and public resource values on Reclamation lands and alleviate conflicts with adjacent lands.

Goal LUM 5: Provide informational, educational, and interpretive materials to increase public awareness of Reclamation boundaries, use restrictions, safety concerns, natural and cultural resource values, and recreational opportunities.

Goal LUM 6: Achieve timely implementation and coordination of RMP programs and projects.

The objectives addressed by the Land Use & Management Goals focus on management and enforcement; cooperation with other agencies and organizations (including the County, Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation [IDPR], U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [USFWS], and U.S. Bureau of Land Management [BLM]); public safety and access restrictions; future use and management of specific parcels, including specific uses such as gravel extraction and fire management; dissemination of public information; and RMP implementation. They describe how and with whom Reclamation must coordinate to develop and implement regulations over Minidoka North Side lands, as well as strategies to keep the public informed about opportunities and restrictions (e.g., regarding restrictions on target shooting and off-road vehicle [ORV] use).

Natural Resources (NAT)

Goal NAT 1: Protect, conserve, and as funding is available enhance wildlife, vegetation, and habitat values on Reclamation lands.

Goal NAT 2: Protect water quality on all Reclamation lands.

Goal NAT 3: Control soil erosion in priority areas where it causes concern for water quality and damage to resources and facilities.

The objectives for Natural Resources focus on maintaining viable habitat for wildlife at appropriate Reclamation parcels within the study area. The objectives also focus on providing protection of and enhancement for wetlands, riparian areas, and rare and protected species. The objectives recognize the importance of cooperation with other agencies and organizations to improve water quality and wildlife habitat by minimizing pollutants (including fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides), reducing erosion, and promoting the re-establishment of native vegetation.

Cultural Resources (CUL)

Goal CUL 1: Seek to protect and preserve cultural resources, including prehistoric and historic-period archaeological sites and traditional cultural properties.

The objectives focus on protecting cultural resources in accordance with all Federal laws (in particular the National Historic Preservation Act, or NHPA); coordinating among resource management partners; and providing opportunities for public education on area prehistory and history.

Indian Sacred Sites (ISS) and Indian Trust Assets (ITA)

Goal ISS 1: Comply with requirements of Executive Order 13007 (Indian Sacred Sites).

Goal ITA 1: Protect and conserve Indian Trust Assets as specified in applicable Secretarial Orders.

The objectives for Indian Sacred Sites and Trust Assets include avoiding actions that would damage such sites, as well as providing access to sacred sites by traditional religious practitioners.

Recreation & Access (REC)

Goal REC 1: Work with Idaho Department of Parks & Recreation in continuing to provide adequate facilities at Lake Walcott State Park and the surrounding area while affording the public a quality recreational experience consistent with natural and cultural resource objectives.

Goal REC 2: Allow for dispersed recreational activities on Reclamation lands, consistent with Project purposes, and natural and cultural resource objectives.

The objectives under the Recreation & Access Goals focus on providing adequate recreation-related opportunities at both developed and undeveloped sites and areas, including camping, trails, concessions, and interpretation/education facilities. Recreation opportunities include both consumptive uses (such as hunting and fishing) as well as non-consumptive uses (such as nature appreciation). Objectives address both monitoring use levels and access in the area, as well as coordination with other management entities at and downstream of Lake Walcott State Park.

Draft Alternatives

The RMP Draft Goals & Objectives form the framework for the development of Draft Alternatives (that is, long-term management approaches) for the Minidoka North Side area. The purpose of the RMP is to manage the Minidoka North Side parcel resources by maintaining Project purposes, while protecting and enhancing natural and cultural resource values and recreation opportunities. According to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Federal agencies are required to evaluate a range of reasonable alternatives to a proposed Federal action. For the Minidoka North Side RMP, the proposed Federal action is the adoption and implementation of the RMP, and the Environmental Assessment (EA) is being prepared to analyze the potential impacts associated with this action.

The Planning Team has developed two draft “action” alternatives, as well as the “No Action” Alternative. Analysis of the No Action Alternative is required by NEPA and is used as the basis from which to compare and evaluate the effects of the action alternatives. Alternative management scenarios should meet the purpose and need of the proposed action while minimizing or avoiding environmental impacts. The preliminary Draft Alternatives were developed from input provided through the first public meeting, Newsbrief response forms returned to Reclamation, Ad Hoc Work Group (AHWG) meetings, and Reclamation’s Planning Team.

The Draft Alternatives address Reclamation’s future management of the 119 separate parcels

(approximately 16,000 acres) that make up the Minidoka North Side area, and are spread out over approximately 527,000 acres. Reclamation obtained these parcels in two phases, first at the beginning of the 20th Century and later in the 1950s. The parcels were withdrawn from the public land base specifically for Reclamation's irrigation projects. Now, however, it is apparent that not all of the parcels are required for operation and maintenance of the irrigation projects. In the long term, some of the parcels will likely be relinquished – that is, put back in public land status and managed primarily by the BLM. A small number of parcels may be available in the long term for purchase by private individuals or entities, but the majority of the parcels will remain under Reclamation's jurisdiction. The RMP is a 15-year management plan to address management of the existing land base (i.e., the 119 parcels); future relinquishment of the parcels that are deemed unneeded for Project purposes has been addressed in a separate process.

As part of the alternatives development process, Reclamation is analyzing various management options as they apply to various resource areas and topics (e.g., natural resources, public information, recreation, municipal uses, agricultural and grazing leases, etc.) according to several themes. The result was the development of two action alternatives that prescribe a change in resource management, as well as the No Action Alternative. Each alternative would result in different future conditions on Reclamation lands in the Minidoka North Side area. All alternatives comply with applicable Federal laws, regulations, and Executive Orders. The three alternatives are summarized below; a full treatment and analysis of the Draft Alternatives will be presented in the Draft EA (scheduled for release in January 2004).

Alternative A - No Action Alternative: Continuation of Existing Management Practices

Alternative A is the No Action Alternative, as required under NEPA. If implemented, it would mean continuing to manage Reclamation lands according to existing agreements and under current laws and regulations. It is important to note

that Alternative A is not necessarily a status quo or “do nothing” approach. Rather, Alternative A would mean continued management of the Minidoka North Side parcels on an ad hoc basis, without benefit of a comprehensive management plan. Some specific highlights of this alternative include:

- No new agricultural leases would be considered, except for over-riding Project purposes.
- Existing grazing leases may be considered for renewal, but no new grazing leases would be considered.
- Sand and gravel extraction would continue to be considered on a case-by-case basis, where it does not conflict with other Reclamation needs.
- Reclamation would require actions to avoid impacts to and facilitate recovery of wildlife and plant species listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA).
- No active management program would be undertaken related to habitat improvement.
- Reclamation would begin to enforce existing regulations and educate the public that motorized vehicular use is prohibited on Reclamation lands off of designated roads.
- At dispersed day use recreation sites, the current lack of formalized management would continue, with no facilities provided.

Alternative B: Improved Implementation of Reclamation Regulations and Policies; Focused Natural & Cultural Resource Protection/ Enhancement

This alternative emphasizes improving implementation of Reclamation's regulations and policies as they relate to the Minidoka North Side lands while providing for natural and cultural resource enhancement in priority areas. Recreation-related activities would require the need for a public entity non-Federal managing partner. Activities related to natural resources would

be undertaken according to a prioritized schedule; some would be implemented in partnership with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG). Some specific highlights of Alternative B include:

- No new agricultural leases would be considered, except for over-riding Project purposes.
- Consider new grazing leases on designated parcels based on protection of and/or improvement of natural land, cultural resource values, and water quality concerns. Also, grazing would be considered as a potential fire management tool for cheatgrass parcels.
- Sand and gravel extraction would be considered on a case-by-case basis where it would not conflict with other Reclamation needs or priority natural resource values.
- In addition to protecting Federal ESA species, Reclamation would facilitate the recovery of State-listed and sensitive species.
- Within budget constraints, Reclamation would improve habitat value by re-seeding disturbed lands to reduce weeds, implementing native vegetation restoration/enhancement efforts, and implementing access/use restrictions on areas with high habitat value.
- An Access Management Plan would be prepared and implemented, designating which routes are considered roads; areas with high habitat values would be closed to vehicular use.

- At Bishops Hole, Reclamation would provide minimum basic facilities.

**Alternative C: Improved
Implementation of Reclamation
Regulations and Policies;
Accommodation of Multiple Uses**

Similar to Alternative B, this alternative also emphasizes improving implementation of Reclamation's regulations and policies. However, the emphasis of Alternative C is on increased accommodation of multiple uses on Reclamation lands. Recreation-related activities would require the need for a public entity non-Federal managing partner to an even greater degree under this alternative than for Alternative B. Like Alternative B, natural resource-related activities would be undertaken according to a prioritized schedule, and some would be implemented in partnership with IDFG. However, emphasis would be placed more on multiple uses of appropriate Reclamation lands and less on improving and restoring natural resource values. Some specific highlights of Alternative C include:

- New agricultural leases would be considered on a case-by-case basis and only if no impacts to Threatened and Endangered Species and minimal impacts to natural and cultural resources are anticipated.

- New grazing leases would be considered on parcels that don't affect operations and maintenance, and don't degrade natural and cultural resource and water quality values. Also, grazing would be considered as a potential fire management tool for cheatgrass parcels.

- Sand and gravel extraction would be considered on a case-by-case basis where it does not conflict with other Reclamation needs (as in Alternative A).
- Like Alternative A, Reclamation would implement required actions to avoid impacts to and facilitate recovery of Federal ESA-listed species, but not State-listed or sensitive species.
- Actions to improve habitat values would be similar to Alternative B, but more limited, with the funding source restricted to Reclamation's existing fire rehabilitation program.
- Similar to Alternative B, an Access Management Plan would be prepared and implemented, but with a focus on multiple uses at established sites.
- Non-Federal managing partner(s) would be sought to provide more active management and facilities at selected day use sites, such as Bishops Hole.

At this point, these are specifically intended as *Draft* Alternatives, meaning that we are inviting your input to modify, add to or delete from, or otherwise change them, as necessary.

For more information, visit us at Reclamation's world wide web site on the internet, at
www.pn.usbr.gov

A Separate but Parallel Effort

The A & B Irrigation District has expressed an interest in gaining title to some of the Minidoka North Side RMP study lands. They would use these lands for disposal of waste water from District drains and squaring-up existing farm units, allowing such units to be converted to sprinkler irrigation and thus conserving the water supplies of the District. This proposal is just beginning to be discussed between Reclamation and the A & B Irrigation District, and few details are known. It is anticipated this will be a separate but parallel effort with the RMP.

Public Meeting/Workshop

We want to emphasize that no final decisions have yet been made regarding the Draft Objectives or Alternatives. Therefore, we encourage your input at the next public meeting/workshop to assist us in continuing to shape the Draft Objectives and/or Alternatives, as needed.

DATE: March 20, 2003
PLACE: Burley Inn
800 N. Overland Ave.
Burley, ID
TIME: 7:00 - 9:00 pm

This location was selected in part because of the facility's accessibility to people with disabilities. Interested persons needing special assistance in this regard should contact Pam Brown, Recreation Specialist, at (208) 678-0461 ext. 32 at least one week before the scheduled meeting so that arrangements can be made. TTYTDD # 1-800-833-6388.



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